



Highlights of [GAO-03-772](#), a report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives

Why GAO Did This Study

Prompted by a desire to reverse declining audience trends and to support the war on terrorism, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the agency responsible for U.S. international broadcasting, began developing its new strategic approach to international broadcasting in July 2001. This approach emphasizes the need to reach mass audiences by applying modern broadcast techniques and strategically allocating resources to focus on high-priority markets. GAO was asked to examine (1) whether recent program initiatives have adhered to the Board's new strategic approach to broadcasting, (2) how the approach's effectiveness will be assessed, and (3) what critical challenges the Board faces in executing its strategy and how these challenges will be addressed.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to the BBG on (1) revising its strategic plan to include measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames; (2) including audience size and other key effectiveness measures as program objectives in the strategic plan; (3) revising its annual performance plan to track the Board's revised strategic plan; and (4) revising the strategic plan to include a clear vision of the Board's intended scope of operations. The Board stated that it largely concurred with our report recommendations.

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To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

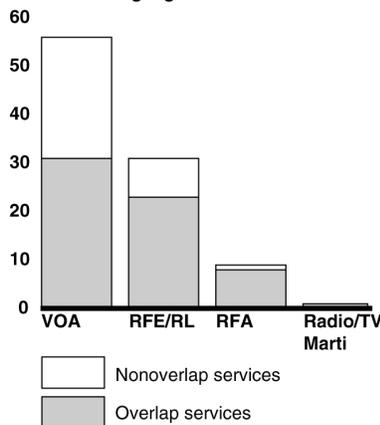
What GAO Found

Consistent with its new plan to dramatically increase the size of U.S. international broadcasting listening and viewing audiences in markets of U.S. strategic interest, the Broadcasting Board of Governors has launched several new projects, including Radio Sawa in the Middle East, Radio Farda in Iran, and the Afghanistan Radio Network. These projects adhere to the Board's core strategy of identifying a target audience and tailoring each broadcast product to market circumstances and audience needs.

The Board's plan lacks measurable program objectives designed to gauge the success of its new approach to broadcasting, detailed implementation strategies, resource needs, and project time frames. A number of key effectiveness measures could provide a starting point for developing measurable program objectives and related performance goals and indicators under the Board's annual performance plan. These measures include audience size in specific markets, audience awareness, broadcaster credibility, and whether the Voice of America (VOA) effectively presents information about U.S. thought, institutions, and policies to target audiences.

The Board has identified a number of market and internal challenges—such as technological innovation and better coordination of its seven separate broadcast entities—that must be addressed to make U.S. international broadcasting more competitive. It has also developed a number of solutions to address these challenges. However, the Board has not addressed how many language services it can carry effectively (with the number rising nearly 20 percent over the past 10 years) and what level of overlap and duplication in VOA and surrogate broadcast services would be appropriate under its new approach to broadcasting. Resolving these questions will have significant resource implications for the Board and its ability to reach larger audiences in high-priority markets.

Language Service Overlap as of April 2003
Number of language services



Language Service Overlap

- 31 of Voice of America's (VOA) 56 services overlap with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), and Radio/TV Marti.
- 23 of RFE/RL's 31 services overlap with VOA.
- 8 of RFA's 9 services overlap with VOA.
- Radio/TV Marti's Spanish service overlaps with VOA's Spanish service.

Source: GAO analysis.